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Teachers get bonus checks today

By Laura Heinauer | Friday, October 31, 2008, 06:00 AM

Christmas is coming a little early this year for some Austin educators.

Bonus checks ranging from \$500 to \$1,500 will be given out today to Austin teachers and principals participating in the second year of the Austin school district's pilot compensation plan.

More than 450 employees working at the districts' seven "highest needs" schools will get retention and recruitment stipends totaling \$442,500 in this round of pay outs. (Click here for the list.) The bonuses are intended to entice well qualified teachers to stay at campuses with the highest populations of economically disadvantaged, special needs and non-English speaking students.

"I'm having a baby in about four weeks. This will help with that," said Tessa Spencer, a Webb Middle School assistant principal. "Any extra — when they recognize you're going a good job and working at a high needs school and dealing with the extra things that come with that — it's nice that they recognize that."

Over the summer, the district gave the first of its "strategic compensation" bonuses to staff who met goals for student improvement. The district budgeted about \$4.3 million in local tax dollars for the program this school year; another \$5.4 million is provided by the state. The overall program seeks to provide educators extra compensation for things like self-improvement, seeking out national certification, hitting targets on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

This year, 11 of the district's 113 campuses are participating in the program, up from nine in 2007-08.